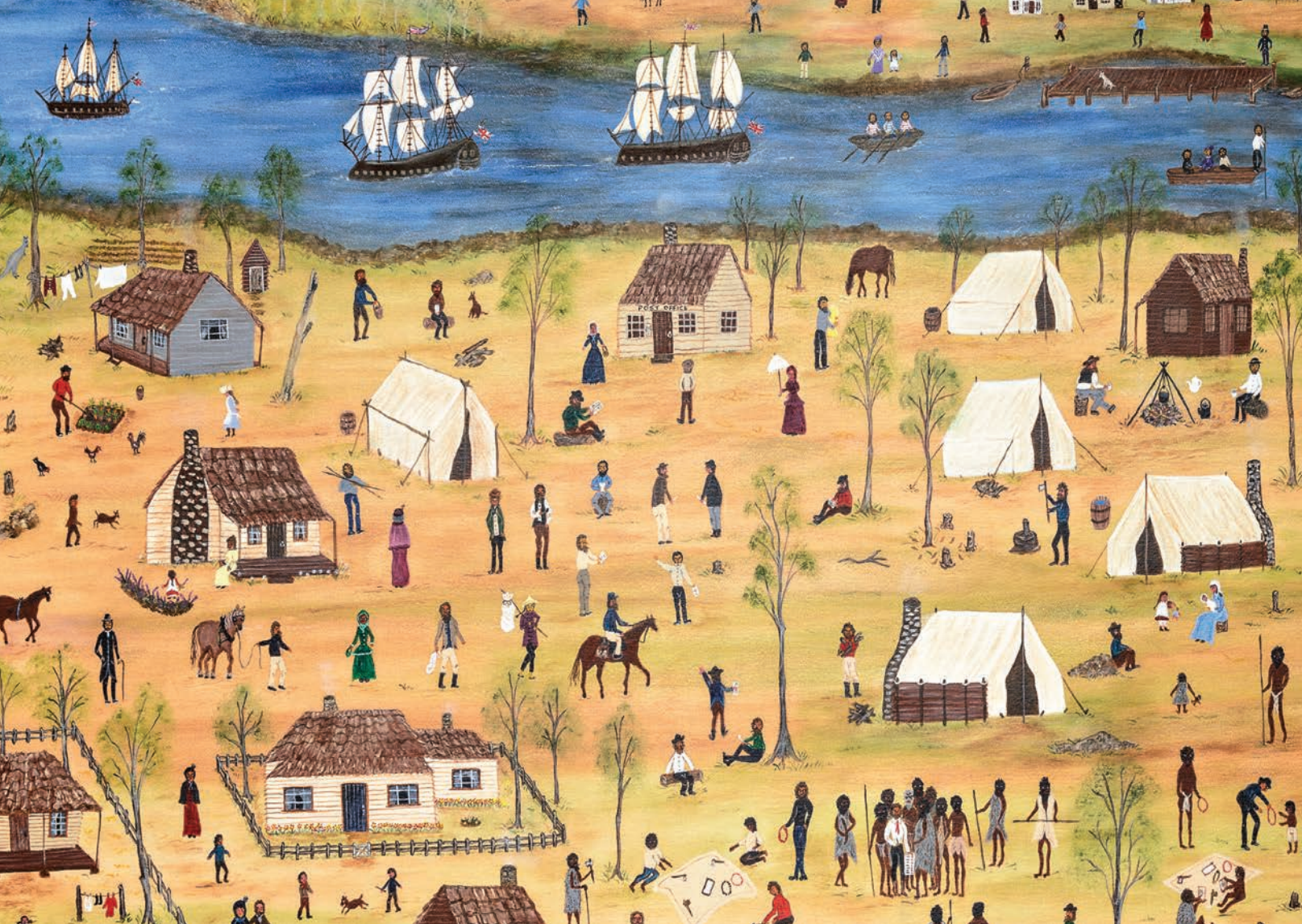


TREATY





TREATY

29 JUL - 18 OCT 2021

Curated by Wemba Wemba, Gunditjmarra artist/curator
Paola Balla, including Aunty Gina Bundle, Peter Waples-Crowe
Aunty Marlene Gilson, Kait James
Laura Thompson, Coree Thorpe

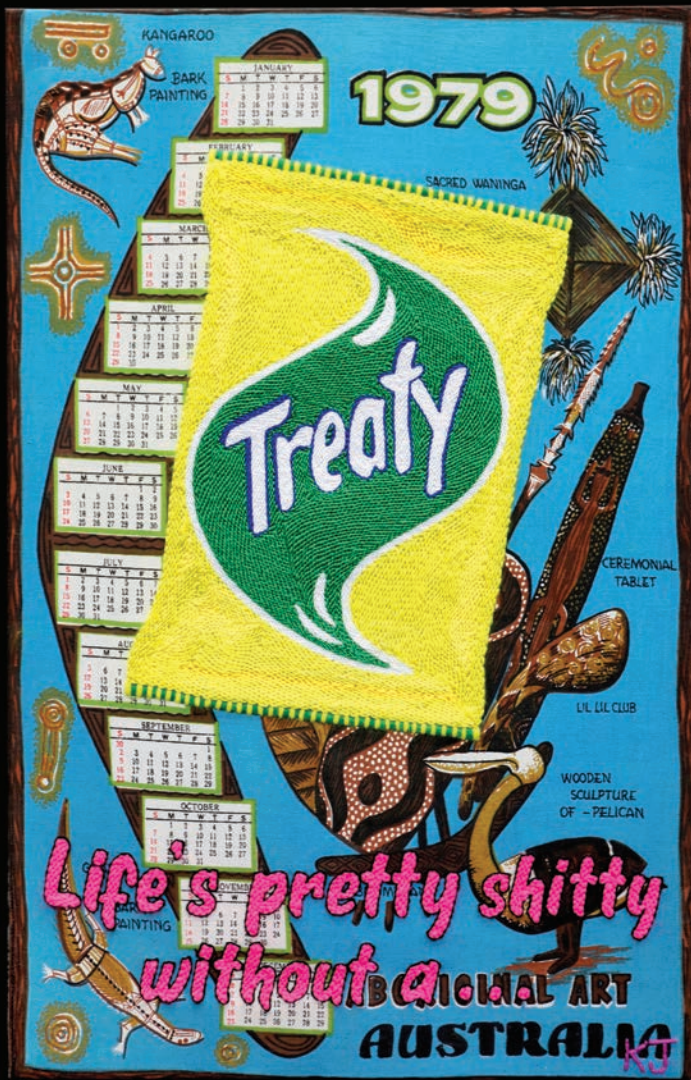
The Victorian Government is in the process of negotiating a Treaty with a number of First Nations clans across, what today is called, the state of Victoria. It will be the first state based Treaty created with First Nations people and is considered by many as long overdue. What does this mean? How is it being managed? Is it what everyone wants?

TREATY is an exhibition that will unpack these questions, engaging with the work of six First Nations artists for whom sovereignty is fundamental to their work and lives.

Wyndham City acknowledges the peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which Wyndham Art Gallery stands and on which the City of Wyndham is being built. We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

Image: Aunty Marlene Gilson - Detail, Land Lost, Land Stolen, Treaty
Image courtesy City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection

Wyndham Art Gallery
Great Art. Deep West.



TREATY

In February 2016, the Victorian Government committed to advancing self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians by working towards Australia's first Treaty/ies with First Peoples.

The *Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Bill 2018* was introduced by the Labor Government in early 2018 and successfully passed through the Victorian Parliament on 21st June 2018. A Treaty is an agreement between states, nations or governments, and can include an agreement between First Peoples and governments.

A Treaty can contain statements of principle, guidelines for future relationships, reparations for past injustices, and guarantees and promises about First Peoples land, sovereignty and identity. 1.

To consider the notion of a Treaty with the First Peoples of this land we first have to consider the notion of Sovereignty. The synonyms of the word spell it better than the definition.

Image: Kait James - Chicken Treaty, 2021 - Image courtesy of the artist
 Image overleaf: Peter Waples-Crowe - Detail Ceremony 2010 - Image courtesy of Dr. Paola Balla.

autonomy • independence • self-government • self-rule • home rule • self-legislation
• self-determination • freedom

This is what First Nations people have been demanding, calling for and fighting for, for generations since the British arrogantly planted their flag and claimed ownership of a whole continent. As is stated in our guest curators essay, Paola is a sovereign being and her claim to that is fundamental to who she is.

Every artist in this exhibition connects their identity and their practice to their sovereignty so it could be argued that all work made by First Nations artists is about treaty given that it's made by sovereign beings who have been denied their sovereign rights for 233 years.

Looked at through this lens there is no need for it to be stated, but in this case Paola has carefully selected a body of work that includes everything from wall paper artwork to earrings. This is testament to the ingenuity and flexibility that First Nations Artists exhibit in their messaging.

I remember well dancing to the famous song by Yothu Yindi *TREATY NOW* in 1988, the year of the Bicentennial. There were protests by Aboriginal peoples from across the country at the same time as the rest of the population celebrated the landing of the First Fleet. I was proud to carry a banner in a very memorable march from Redfern to Hyde Park where there was a joyful moment of realisation by both Aboriginal people and their non-Aboriginal supporters, that maybe there was a possibility of conciliation between these two vastly different cultures. While much has been achieved since then a treaty is not one of them. This exhibition asks us all to consider if a treaty is so long overdue, what does it mean now? How is it being managed? Is it what everyone wants? *TREATY* is an exhibition that invites us to unpack these questions through engaging with the work of six First Nations artists for whom sovereignty is fundamental to their work and lives.







TREATY

Catalogue Essay

Curator Dr. Paola Balla

Treaty often feels like a tease, an offering, a glimpse into an unknown future in which we are unsure of a just future for us as Blackfellas in a continually colonising colony.

In considering an exhibition about the topic and potentiality of a treaty, I thought carefully about responsibility and accountability. To community, family and Ancestors. To myself as an artist and curator and academic. And most centrally as a sovereign Aboriginal person, specifically as a Wemba-Wemba & Gunditjmara person, and as a matriarchal woman.

Importantly I didn't want to take any particular position on the notion of a treaty, but also to approach it from an Indigenous standpoint, one of theory and lived responsibility and relationality, (Moreton-Robinson)¹. and to think from a

Image Left: Kait James - Chicken Treaty, 2021 detail - Image courtesy of the artist

position of care as part of the work of curating art by and for Aboriginal community. One of the main goals I had for this exhibition theme, which was developed by Maree Clarke and dr megan evans for Wyndham Art Gallery, was to honour the theme of Treaty they had begun with and do it some justice.

There are many diverse positions on a treaty in Victoria for the Mob that live here, and in particular for First Peoples of so-called Victoria, in the past known as Koories or Woongis, specifically as our particular tribal or language groups. For myself it is as a Wemba-Wemba & Gunditjmara woman from the Day and Egan Families respectively from the Missions, Framlingham and Moonahcullah, and also as a Footscray born, western suburbs Blackfulla.

Connections that are thousands of years old, and relationships that are interconnected through blood, kinship, language, families and Ancestors are at the core of our being. Knowing who we are, strengthens us and places us in our communities.

We claim, and are claimed by our Families and Mobs and that claiming places us and holds us, and holds us in our responsibilities as community members. Despite calls for Treaty by Aboriginal Peoples in so called Australia, 'no treaty has ever been negotiated between an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clan or nation and an Australian government at any level....

The Victorian Government introduced the *Advancing the Treaty Process with the Aboriginal Victorians Bill 2018* on 7 March 2018, and if passed this would constitute the first legislation in Australia to address treaty with Indigenous Australians.

1. <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/publications/research-papers/send/36-research-papers/13862-treaty-discussions-in-australia-an-overview>

A Treaty may finally pave the way for formally eradicating the lingering effects of the declaration of Terra Nullius, which was dismissed in the High Court at the time of the Mabo decision, however in Victoria, Aboriginal Peoples are still fighting for recognition of land rights and rights of Country and connections to Country and the protection of Country to be upheld.

The fight by Djab Wurrung Peoples, women in particular, to protect their Birthing Trees and sites is a most recent example.

Here in the exhibition TREATY, we see a diverse range of Aboriginal artists of Victorian Mobs making work that speaks to notions of Treaty, from utilising humour, like Kait James's ironic and funny tea towel that's called *Chicken Treaty* and shows an altered packet of chicken twisties, to the historical painting by Aunty Marlene Gilson whose *Treaty Land Lost, Land Stolen, Treaty, 2016* painting gives us a birds eye view of a treaty frozen in time, failing to progress or unveil a just path of colonialism in so called Victoria.

From painter Coree Thorpe *Brothers in Arms, 2020* we see a very personal familial portrait of Koorie youth, bonded by blood, love and family connections, on special loan from Gabby Johnson's personal collection. This is a painting commissioned for the love of family and Black pride.

Aunty Gina Bundle's small but intricate and resonate possum skin, *A Historical Document In Its Own Right, 2018* is the cultural design map for the larger Treaty Assembly possum skin cloak. Aunty Gina's cloak has been made with intent and cultural processes at heart to embed material cultural practices and ensure that this is seen and felt in the Treaty gatherings.



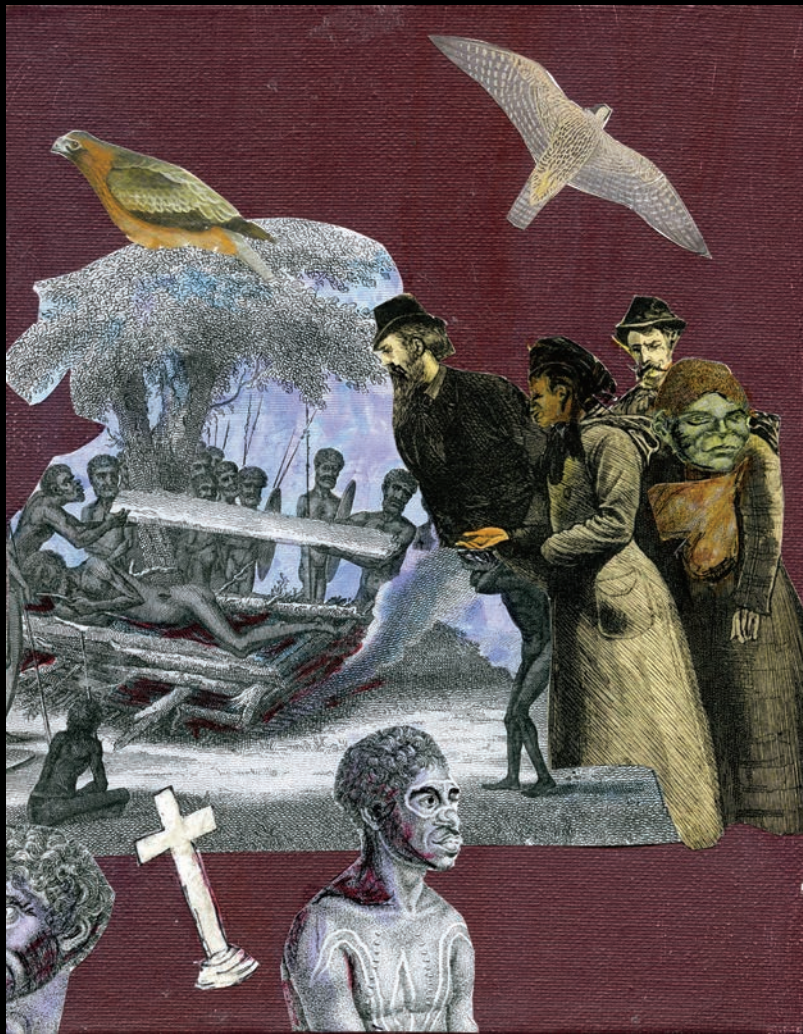


Image Left: Peter Waples-Crowe - The Wives - image courtesy of the artist
Image Right : Coree Thorpe - Brothers in Arms - image courtesy of Gabby Johnson





Peter Waples-Crowe's print, *Ceremony* is from 2010 and featured on the cover of an important publication, an all Indigenous edition of Etchings published by Illura Press with the theme of Treaty. Peter's print speaks to Black urban life and survival of Queerness and othering in colonial life and celebrates survival and the relationship between Country and city life.

Laura Thompson has carved out a name in the quest for justice in calls to "free the flag," and through her community fashion initiative, *Clothing The Gaps*. Here we see a more intimate matriarchal message of Treaty within her *Koorie Circle* jewellery *Treaty earrings*.

Here, Treaty is worn to be adorned on the body to remind the wearer and viewers that treaty has both personal and political work and purpose.

And finally in my *Banner Time*, 2021 works, I brought together my love for Country and passion for politics in both the personal, family and community and public spaces where our voices find themselves.

By presenting these foundational terms, sovereign, treaty, un-ceded and self-determined, on bush dyed fabric, I wanted to distil these concepts, these ways of being, knowing and doing, as central to our lived experiences.

By reducing the language down to the bare minimum to what is at the very core of what we want and need to say as sovereign peoples, we want and aspire to treaty as a form of justice, health and well-being for Aboriginal Peoples.

That treaty must be self-determined, by and for us, and reflect that our 'Clans and Elders belong to Country and Treaty' as it is stated in the *Sovereign First Nations Treaty Commission booklet* from 2016. 2.

Healing for our Peoples from colonial traumas and institutional violence is vital to justice and wellbeing, and that healing and protecting Country and remembering that Country itself has rights, memories and sovereignty is inherent.



If a treaty with First Peoples in so called Victoria can realistically achieve justice and the truth telling required, then history will be made.

The artists in TREATY, all make work that contributes to the larger narrative of Aboriginal community life that is diverse, distinct and complex.

Their work gives us glimpses into other ways of seeing, being and doing, that visual sovereignties are vital to feeling our way through processes like treaty, not just debating them, but letting them sit and be contemplated in deep listening.

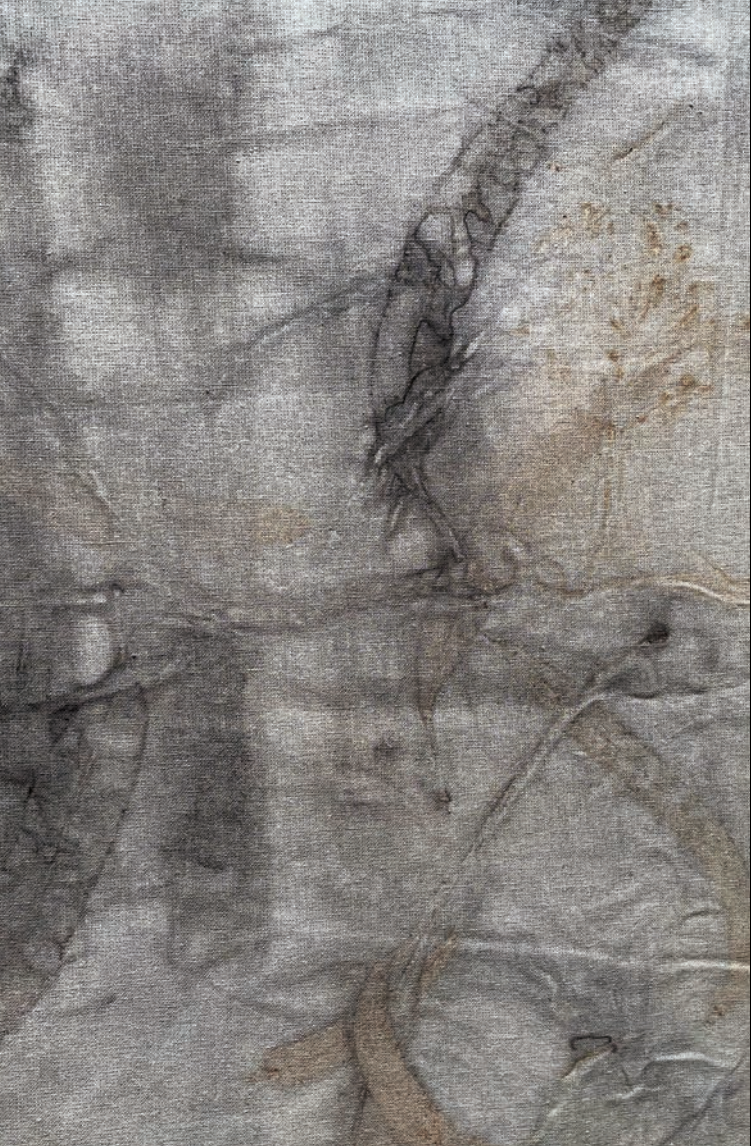
1. Relationality refers to the theory of reality that interprets the existence, nature, and meaning of things in terms of their relatedness. Moreton-Robinson, Aileen (2017) Relationality: A key presupposition of an Indigenous social research paradigm. In O'Brien, J M & Andersen, C (Eds.) Sources and methods in Indigenous studies (Routledge Guides to Using Historical Sources). Routledge, United Kingdom, pp. 69-77.

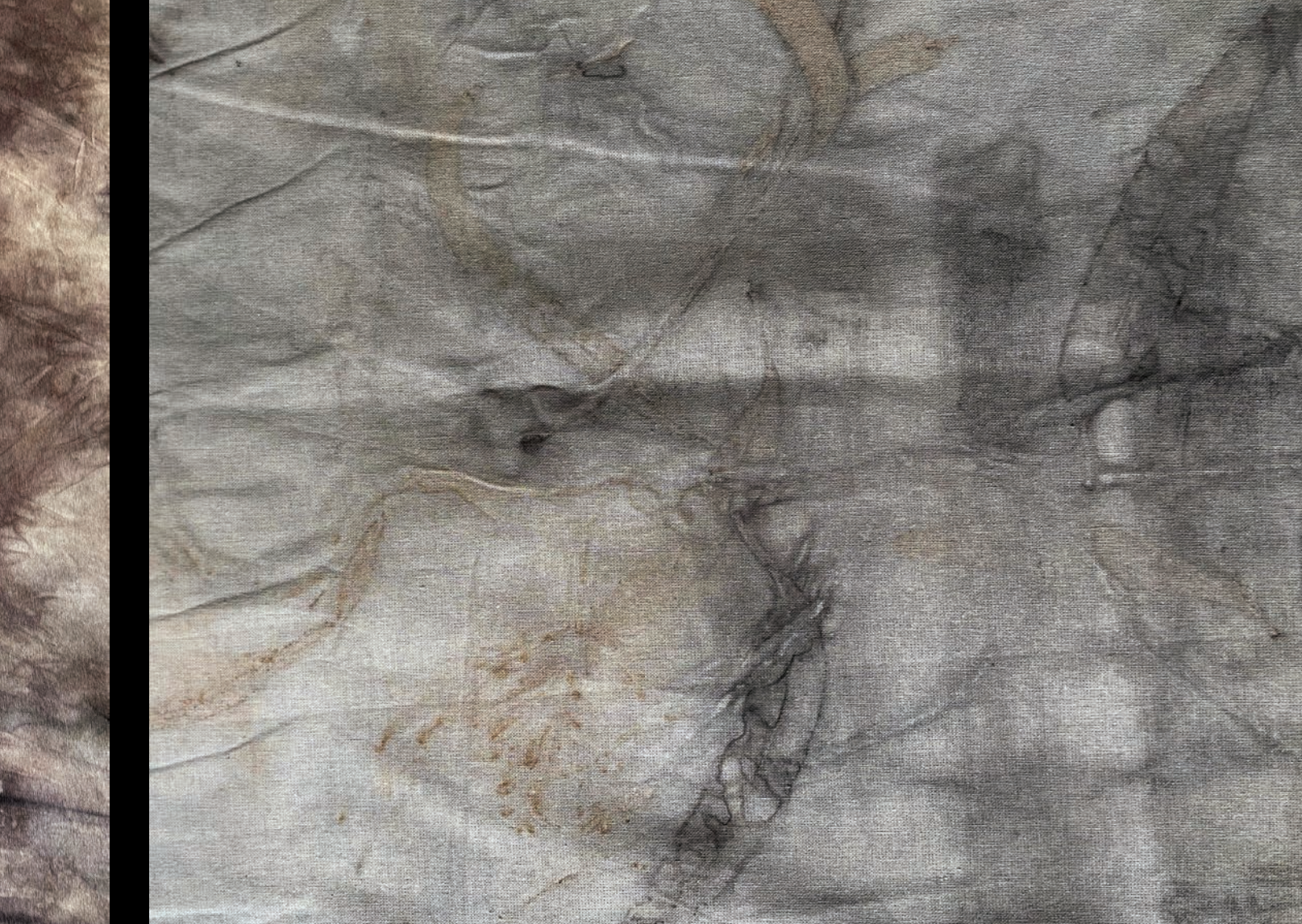
2. <https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/submission/2017-07/PMC%2026.%20Victorian%20Traditional%20Owner%20Land%20and%20Justice%20Group.pdf>
Edited by Timmah Ball





Image: Aunty Gina Bundle - A Historical Document In It's Own Right - Image courtesy of the artist
Image overleaf: Bannaer Time 2021 - Paola Balla - Image courtesy of the artist







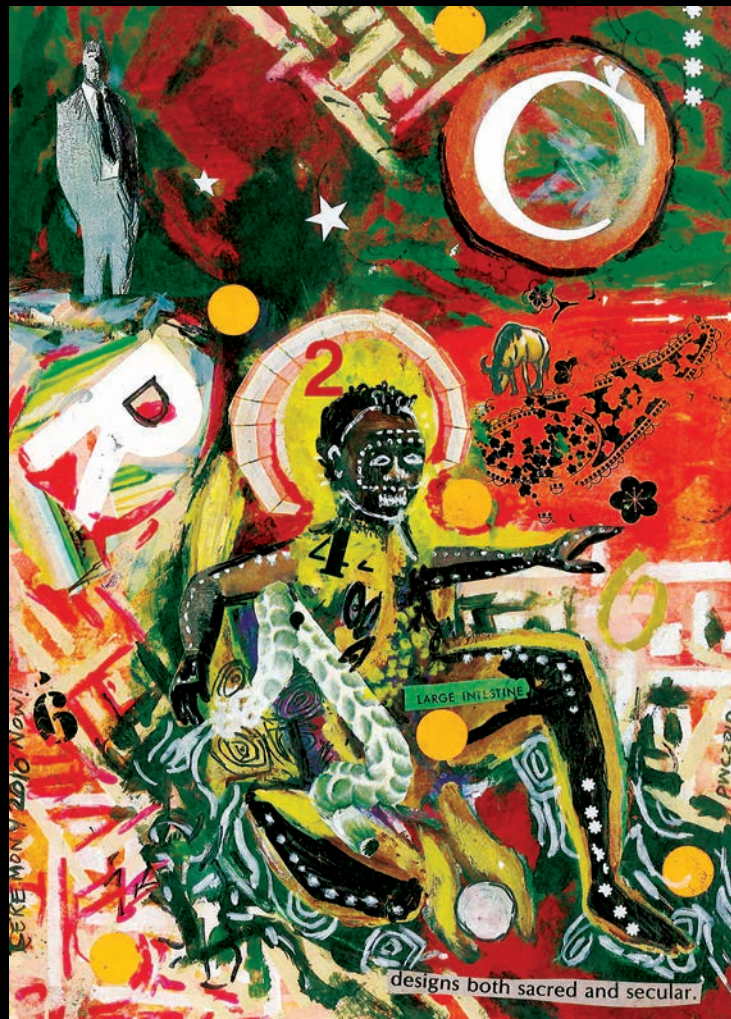
FREE
THE
FLAG

TREATY

RIMBALARA

FOOTBALL / NETBALL CLUB

MELB
STAI



Artist in Conversation TREATY

16 September 2021

Doors open at 6:30pm for a 7pm start

TREATY is something that has been called for by Aboriginal people since the beginning of colonisation in this country. Yothu Yindi's famous song Treaty was released in June 1991 and people all over the world danced to it and sang out the words.

Hear from Coree Thorpe and Aunty Gina Bundle, artists in the TREATY exhibition, in discussion with guest Curator, Wemba-Wemba Gunditjmarra artist/curator Dr Paola Balla as they unpack the way their work and lives are impacted by this call for Treaty today and how their sovereignty is at the forefront of all they do.

Access this discussion as well as past Artist in Conversation event recordings through through Wyndham Art Gallery's podcast channel *Go Deeper* at:

<https://wyndhamartgallery.podbean.com/>

Kopi Healing Workshop

Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 Sept, 2021

Join artist Maree Clarke in a workshop that embodies the experience of healing through art. A Mutti Mutti, Yorta Yorta, BoonWurrung / Wemba Wemba artist, Maree is a multidisciplinary artist renowned for her work that revives elements of South-eastern Aboriginal art practices, lost in the period of colonization.

Using art as a tool to heal, Maree will share her substantial research into Kopi mourning practices and provide participants with a deeply moving process to experience their own healing from embodied grief.

Check website for details
wyndham.vic.gov.au/arts

ARTISTS

Paola Balla - Aunty Gina Bundle

Peter Waples-Crowe

Aunty Marlene Gilson

Kait James - Coree Thorpe

Laura Thompson



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wyndham.vic.gov.au/arts

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